

Suzuki Fears It's "Too Late" to Change Current Climate Trajectory – But the Fight is Not Over

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Prominent environmental advocate David Suzuki recently issued a distressful, but well-founded, stance on the current state of climate change. In an interview with iPolitics this July Suzuki discussed Canadian political discourse impacting environmental action. Noting that Mark Carney, the newly appointed Prime Minister, held a climate finance post at the UN before pursuing politics, Suzuki indicated that being very well-informed on climate change does not necessarily coincide with action. The major political focus remains on economic growth, a "creed of cancer" that is not sustainable in a finite world. This prioritization of the economy above the very atmosphere that gives us air to breathe spurred Suzuki to state that, when it comes to avoiding at least some level of catastrophic global heating, "it's too late".

While Suzuki assures us that there are solutions available to slow and eventually cap global heating, he justifies his concern for public and political apathy regarding our current climate by referencing Johan Rockström's proposed planetary boundaries. These are boundaries which we cannot surpass in order to maintain a safe operating space for humanity, including climate change, biosphere integrity, land-system change, freshwater use, biogeochemical flows, ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, atmospheric aerosol loading, and the introduction of novel entities (such as new chemicals and plastics). Of these planetary boundaries, we have only dealt with one – the ozone layer. Conversely, we have crossed the threshold point of six other boundaries since they were first defined in 2009, and this year, we breached the seventh – ocean acidification.

The remaining boundary, atmospheric aerosol loading, refers to the amount of solid or liquid particles suspended in the air. While some aerosols are released by natural sources, a significant amount is produced by anthropogenic (human-driven) activities such as the burning of fossil fuels. Canadian industry and government are actively promoting this process with the creation of more pipelines and new coal mines. Additionally, the U.S. government has overturned the majority of its climate policies, cut incentives for clean energy and is intensifying promotion of, and subsidies for, gas, oil and coal. We must, therefore, take it upon ourselves to prioritize the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

Scientists overwhelmingly agree that global temperature should not exceed pre-industrial levels by 1.5°C, but we are on our way to a more than 3°C rise by the end of this century. This could trigger feedback loops and generate domino-effects that maintain unstable environments for decades or potentially centuries, even if temperatures fall back below the 1.5°C threshold.

Despite this, Suzuki has not given up hope, nor should we. Reducing the intensity of global warming to prevent its increasingly adverse effects relies on a wide-scale collaborative effort from society to make more informed decisions. But what can we simultaneously achieve on a more local scale? While advocating in the political sphere is always an important and impactful way to spark change, these changes tend to be incremental. What Suzuki is calling for is a revolution. He notes that many efforts in the environmental movement have been caught up in assuming politicians will make the right decisions. He suggests that, rather than relying primarily on forcing change through political systems and waiting for consequential efforts, communities must take action into their own hands.

We are already experiencing many repercussions of the climate crisis, including extreme weather events, floods, droughts and increasingly severe wildfires. As these emergencies heighten, governments will likely be unable to respond on the scale or with the speed required. In light of this fact, Suzuki urges local communities to "shift our priorities, hunker down and actualize

Youth march through the streets of Kijipuktuk/Halifax at the 2024 climate strike. PHOTOS: Sara Farias



“Let's fight like mad to be as resilient as we can in the face of what's coming.”

TAKE ACTION

Find ways that you can plug into the climate movement. Get together with your community to see how you can support one another and create climate resilience.

them.” He suggests connecting with our neighbourhood to find out who has extra provisions, where water is available and who's going to need help in an emergency – such as those with mobility issues. Lytton, B.C. is a great example of this kind of community resilience. Following a devastating wildfire in 2021, the town has been focusing on rebuilding. Their plan includes constructing a Community Hub, a safe space for residents that will host community events and provide various services. It will be net-zero and have climate resilience built in, with a swimming pool that can double as a water reservoir when needed.

While we no longer avoid a certain amount of runaway global heating and the impacts it will have on our lives, this does not mean the fight is over. The goal is for each community to become as self-reliant and self-sufficient as possible. This, however, does not mean acting alone as it truly takes a village. Be a good neighbour and inform others about the threats associated with climate change, then create a plan. Rally together and lean on each other for help and guidance. No matter what differences we may have, we all call this planet home. Protecting the Earth and our communities is what matters most.

Quoting the Canadian climate change champion himself: “Let's fight like mad to be as resilient as we can in the face of what's coming.”



2023 Kijipuktuk/Halifax climate strike.

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